

Fleming, Ian - [James Bond]

From A View To A Kill



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FROM A VIEW TO A KILL

The eyes behind the wide black rubber goggles were cold as flint. In the howling speed-turmoil

of a BSA M20 doing seventy, they were the only quiet things in the hurtling flesh and metal. Protected

by the glass of the goggles, they stared fixedly ahead from just above the centre of the handlebars, and

their dark unwavering focus was that of gun muzzles. Below the goggles, the wind had got into the face

through the mouth and had wrenched the lips back into a square grin that showed big tombstone teeth

and strips of whitish gum. On both sides of the grin the cheeks had been blown out by the wind into

pouches that fluttered slightly. To right and left of the hurtling face under the crash helmet, the black

gauntlets, broken-wristed at the controls, looked like the attacking paws of a big animal.

The man was dressed in the uniform of a dispatch-rider in the Royal Corps of Signals, and his

machine, painted olive green, was, with certain modifications to the valves and the carburettor and the

removal of some of the silencer baffles to give more speed, identical with a standard British Army

machine. There was nothing in the man or his equipment to suggest that he was not what he appeared

to be, except a fully loaded Luger held by a clip to the top of the petrol tank.

It was seven o'clock on a May morning and the dead straight road through the forest glittered

with the tiny luminous mist of spring. On both sides of the road the moss- and flower-carpeted depths

between the great oak trees held the theatrical enchantment of the royal forests of Versailles and St

Germain. The road was D98, a secondary road serving local traffic in the St Germain area, and the

motor-cyclist had just passed beneath the Paris-Mantes autoroute already thundering with commuter

traffic for Paris. He was heading north towards St Germain and there was no one else in sight in either

direction, except, perhaps half a mile ahead, an almost identical figure another Royal Corps

dispatch-rider. He was a younger, slimmer man and he sat comfortably back on his machine, enjoying

the morning and keeping his speed to around forty. He was well on time and it was a beautiful day. He

wondered whether to have his eggs fried or scrambled when he got back to HQ around eight.

Five hundred yards, four hundred, three, two, one. The man coming up from behind slowed to

fifty. He put his right gauntlet up to his teeth and pulled it off. He stuffed the gauntlet between the

buttons of his tunic and reached down and unclipped the gun.

By now he must have been big in the driving-mirror of the young man ahead, for suddenly the

young man jerked his head round, surprised to find another dispatch-rider on his run at that time of the

morning. He expected that it would be an American or perhaps French military police. It might be

anyone from the eight NATO nations that made up the staff of SHAPE, but when he recognized the

uniform of the Corps he was astonished and delighted. Who the hell could it be? He raised a cheerful

right thumb in recognition and cut his speed to thirty, waiting for the other man to drift up alongside.

With one eye on the road ahead and the other on the approaching silhouette in the mirror, he ran

through the names of the British riders in the Special Service Transportation Unit at Headquarters

Command. Albert, Sid, Wally might be Wally, same thick build. Good show! He'd be able to pull

his leg about that little frog bit in the canteen Louise, Elise, Lise what the hell was her name.

The man with the gun had slowed. Now he was fifty yards away. His face, undistorted by the

wind, had set into blunt, hard, perhaps Slav lines. A red spark burned behind the black, aimed muzzles

of the eyes. Forty yards, thirty. A single magpie flew out of the forest ahead of the young dispatch-

rider. It fled clumsily across the road into the bushes behind a Michelin sign that said that St Germain

was one kilometre to go. The young man grinned and raised an ironical finger in salute and self-

protection 'One magpie is sorrow'.

Twenty yards behind him the man with the gun took both hands off the handlebars, lifted the

Luger, rested it carefully on his left forearm and fired one shot.

The young man's hands whipped off his controls and met across the centre of his backward-

arching spine. His machine veered across the road, jumped a narrow ditch and ploughed into a patch of

grass and lilies of the valley. There it rose up on its screaming back wheel and slowly crashed

backwards on top of its dead rider. The BSA coughed and kicked and

tore at the young man's clothes

and at the flowers, and then lay quiet.

The killer executed a narrow turn and stopped with his machine pointing back the way he had

come. He stamped down the wheel-rest, pulled his machine up on to it and walked in among the wild

flowers under the trees. He knelt down beside the dead man and brusquely pulled back an eyelid. Just

as roughly he tore the black leather dispatch-case off the corpse and ripped open the buttons of the

tunic and removed a battered leather wallet. He wrenched a cheap wrist-watch so sharply off the left

wrist that the chrome expanding bracelet snapped in half. He stood up and slung the dispatch-case over

his shoulder. While he stowed the wallet and the watch away in his tunic pocket he listened. There

were only forest sounds and the slow tick of hot metal from the crashed BSA. The killer retraced his

steps to the road. He walked slowly, scuffing leaves over the tyre marks in the soft earth and moss. He

took extra trouble over the deep scars in the ditch and the grass verge, and then stood beside his motor-

cycle and looked back towards the lily of the valley patch. Not bad! Probably only the police dogs

would get it, and, with ten miles of road to cover, they would be hours, perhaps days plenty long

enough. The main thing in these jobs was to have enough safety margin. He could have shot the man at

forty yards, but he had preferred to get to twenty. And taking the watch and the wallet had been nice

touches pro touches.

Pleased with himself, the man heaved his machine off its rest, vaulted smartly into the saddle

and kicked down on the starter. Slowly, so as not to show skid marks, he accelerated away back down

the road and in a minute or so he was doing seventy again and the wind had redrawn the empty turnip

grin across his face.

Around the scene of the killing, the forest, which had held its breath while it was done, slowly

began to breathe again.

James Bond had his first drink of the evening at Fouquet's. It was not a solid drink. One cannot

drink seriously in French cafés. Out of doors on a pavement in the sun is no place for vodka or whisky

or gin. A fine *à l'eau* is fairly serious, but it intoxicates without tasting very good. A quart de

champagne or a champagne *à l'orange* is all right before luncheon, but in the evening one quart leads

to another quart and a bottle of indifferent champagne is a bad foundation for the night. Pernod is

possible, but it should be drunk in company, and anyway Bond had never liked the stuff because its

liquorice taste reminded him of his childhood. No, in cafes you have to drink the least offensive of the

musical comedy drinks that go with them, and Bond always had the same thing an *Americano*

Bitter Campari, Cinzano, a large slice of lemon peel and soda. For the soda he always stipulated

Perrier, for in his opinion expensive soda water was the cheapest way to improve a poor drink.

When Bond was in Paris he invariably stuck to the same addresses. He

stayed at the Terminus

Nord, because he liked station hotels and because this was the least pretentious and most anonymous of

them. He had luncheon at the Café de la Paix, the Rotonde or the Dôme, because the food was good

enough and it amused him to watch the people. If he wanted a solid drink he had it at Harry's Bar, both

because of the solidity of the drinks and because, on his first ignorant visit to Paris at the age of sixteen,

he had done what Harry's advertisement in the Continental Daily Mail had told him to do and had said

to his taxi-driver 'Sank Roo Doe Noo'. That had started one of the memorable evenings of his life,

culminating in the loss, almost simultaneous, of his virginity and his notecase. For dinner, Bond went

to one of the great restaurants Véfour, the Caneton, Lucas-Carton or the Cochon d'Or. These he

considered, whatever Michelin might say about the Tour d'Argent, Maxims and the like, to have

somehow avoided the tarnish of the expense account and the dollar. Anyway, he preferred their

cooking. After dinner he generally went to the Place Pigalle to see what would happen to him. When,

as usual, nothing did, he would walk home across Paris to the Gare du Nord and go to bed.

Tonight Bond decided to tear up this dusty address-book and have himself an old-fashioned ball.

He was on his way through Paris after a dismally failed assignment on the Austro-Hungarian border. It

had been a question of getting a certain Hungarian out. Bond had been sent from London specially to

direct the operation over the head of Station V. This had been unpopular with the Vienna Station. There

had been misunderstandings wilful ones. The man had been killed in the frontier minefield. There

would have to be a court of inquiry. Bond was due back at his London headquarters on the following

day to make his report, and the thought of it all depressed him. Today had been so beautiful one of

those days when you almost believe that Paris is beautiful and gay and Bond had decided to give the

town just one more chance. He would somehow find himself a girl who was a real girl, and he would

take her to dinner at some make-believe place in the Bois like the Armenonville. To clean the money-

look out of her eyes for it would certainly be there he would as soon as possible give her fifty

thousand francs. He would say to her: 'I propose to call you Donatienne, or possibly Solange, because

these are names that suit my mood and the evening. We knew each other before and you lent me this

money because I was in a jam. Here it is, and now we will tell each other what we have been doing

since we last met in St Tropez just a year ago. In the meantime, here is the menu and the wine list and

you must choose what will make you happy and fat.' And she would look relieved at not having to try

any more, and she would laugh and say: 'But, James, I do not want to be fat.' And there they would be,

started on the myth of 'Paris in the Spring', and Bond would stay sober and be interested in her and

everything she said. And, by God, by the end of the evening it would not be his fault if it transpired that

there was in fact no shred of stuffing left in the hoary old fairytale of 'A good time in Paris'.

Sitting in Fouquet's, waiting for his Americano, Bond smiled at his vehemence. He knew that he

was only playing at this fantasy for the satisfaction of launching a last kick at a town he had cordially

disliked since the War. Since 1945, he had not had a happy day in Paris. It was not that the town had

sold its body. Many towns have done that. It was its heart that was gone pawned to the tourists,

pawned to the Russians and Roumanians and Bulgars, pawned to the scum of the world who had

gradually taken the town over. And, of course, pawned to the Germans. You could see it in the people's

eyes sullen, envious, ashamed. Architecture? Bond glanced across the pavement at the shiny black

ribbons of cars off which the sun glinted painfully. Everywhere it was the same as in the Champs-

Elysées. There were only two hours in which you could even see the town between five and seven in

the morning. After seven it was engulfed in a thundering stream of black metal with which no beautiful

buildings, no spacious, tree-lined boulevards, could compete.

The waiter's tray clattered down on the marble-topped table. With a slick one-handed jerk that

Bond had never been able to copy, the waiter's bottle-opener prised the cap off the Perrier. The man

slipped the tab under the ice-bucket, said a mechanical "Voilà, M'sieur" and darted away. Bond put ice

into his drink, filled it to the top with soda and took a long pull at it. He sat back and lit a Laurens

jaune. Of course the evening would be a disaster. Even supposing he found the girl in the next hour or

so, the contents would certainly not stand up to the wrapping. On closer examination she would turn

out to have the heavy, dank, wide-pored skin of the bourgeois French. The blonde hair under the rakish

velvet beret would be brown at the roots and as coarse as piano wire. The peppermint on the breath

would not conceal the midday garlic. The alluring figure would be intricately scaffolded with wire and

rubber. She would be from Lille and she would ask him if he was American. And, Bond smiled to

himself, she or her maquereau would probably steal his notecase. La ronde! He would be back where

he came in. More or less, that was. Well, to hell with it!

A battered black Peugeot 403 broke out of the centre stream of traffic, cut across the inside line

of cars and pulled in to double park at the kerb. There was the usual screaming of brakes, hooting and

yelling. Quite unmoved, a girl got out of the car and, leaving the traffic to sort itself out, walked

purposefully across the sidewalk. Bond sat up. She had everything, but absolutely everything that

belonged in his fantasy. She was tall and, although her figure was hidden by a light raincoat, the way

she moved and the way she held herself promised that it would be beautiful. The face had the gaiety

and bravado that went with her driving, but now there was impatience in the compressed lips and the

eyes fretted as she pushed diagonally through the moving crowd on the pavement.

Bond watched her narrowly as she reached the edge of the tables and came up the aisle. Of

course it was hopeless. She was coming to meet someone her lover. She was the sort of woman who

always belongs to somebody else. She was late for him. That's why she was in such a hurry. What

damnable luck right down to the long blonde hair under the rakish beret! And she was looking

straight at him. She was smiling . . . ! Before Bond could pull himself together, the girl had come up to

his table and had drawn out a chair and sat down.

She smiled rather tautly into his startled eyes. "I'm sorry I'm late, and I'm afraid we've got to get

moving at once. You're wanted at the office." She added under her breath: "Crash dive."

Bond jerked himself back to reality. Whoever she was, she was certainly from 'the firm'. 'Crash

dive' was a slang expression the Secret Service had borrowed from the Submarine Service. It meant bad

news the worst. Bond dug into his pocket and slid some coins over the table. He said "Right. Let's

go," and got up and followed her down through the tables and across to her car. It was still obstructing

the inner lane of traffic. Any minute now there would be a policeman. Angry faces glared at them as

they climbed in. The girl had left the engine running. She banged the gears into second and slid out into

the traffic.

Bond looked sideways at her. The pale skin was velvet. The blonde hair was silk to the roots.

He said: "Where are you from and what's it all about?"

She said, concentrating on the traffic: "From the Station. Grade two assistant. Number 765 on

duty, Mary Ann Russell off. I've no idea what it's all about. I just saw the signal from HQ personal

from M to Head of Station. Most Immediate and all that. He was to find you at once and if necessary

use the Deuxième to help. Head of F said you always went to the same places when you were in Paris,

and I and another girl were given a list." She smiled. "I'd only tried Harry's Bar, and after Fouquet's I

was going to start on the restaurants. It was marvellous picking you up like that." She gave him a quick

glance. "I hope I wasn't very clumsy."

Bond said: "You were fine. How were you going to handle it if I'd had a girl with me?"

She laughed. "I was going to do much the same except call you 'sir'. I was only worried about

how you'd dispose of the girl. If she started a scene I was going to offer to take her home in my car and

for you to take a taxi."

"You sound pretty resourceful. How long have you been in the Service?"

"Five years. This is my first time with a Station."

"How do you like it?"

"I like the work all right. The evenings and days off drag a bit. It's not easy to make friends in

Paris without" her mouth turned down with irony "without all the rest. I mean," she hastened to

add, "I'm not a prude and all that, but somehow the French make the whole business such a bore. I

mean I've had to give up taking the Metro or buses. Whatever time of day it is, you end up with your

behind black and blue." She laughed. "Apart from the boredom of it and not knowing what to say to the

man, some of the pinches really hurt. It's the limit. So to get around I bought this car cheap, and other

cars seem to keep out of my way. As long as you don't catch the other driver's eye, you can take on

even the meanest of them. They're afraid you haven't seen them. And they're worried by the bashed-

about look of the car. They give you a wide berth."

They had come to the Rond Point. As if to demonstrate her theory, she tore round it and went

straight at the line of traffic coming up from the Place de la Concorde. Miraculously it divided and let

her through into the Avenue Matignon.

Bond said: "Pretty good. But don't make it a habit. There may be some French Mary Anns

about."

She laughed. She turned into the Avenue Gabrielle and pulled up outside the Paris headquarters

of the Secret Service: "I only try that sort of manuvre in the line of duty."

Bond got out and came round to her side of the car. He said: "Well, thanks for picking me up.

When this whirl is over, can I pick you up in exchange? I don't get the pinches, but I'm just as bored in

Paris as you are."

Her eyes were blue and wide apart. They searched his. She said seriously: "I'd like that. The

switchboard here can always find me."

Bond reached in through the window and pressed the hand on the wheel. He said "Good," and

turned and walked quickly in through the archway.

Wing Commander Rattray, Head of Station F, was a fattish man with pink cheeks and fair hair

brushed straight back. He dressed in a mannered fashion with turned-back cuffs and double slits to his

coat, bow-ties and fancy waistcoats. He made a good-living, wine-and-food-society impression in

which only the slow, rather cunning blue eyes struck a false note. He chain-smoked Gauloises and his

office stank of them. He greeted Bond with relief. "Who found you?"

"Russell. At Fouquet's. Is she new?"

"Six months. She's a good one. But take a pew. There's the hell of a flap on and I've got to brief

you and get you going." He bent to his intercom and pressed down a switch. "Signal to M, please.

Personal from Head of Station. 'Located 007 briefing now.' Okay?" He let go the switch.

Bond pulled a chair over by the open window to keep away from the fog of Gauloises. The

traffic on the Champs-Élysées was a soft roar in the background. Half an hour before he had been fed

up with Paris, glad to be going. Now he hoped he would be staying.

Head of F said: "Somebody got our dawn dispatch-rider from SHAPE to the St Germain Station

yesterday morning. The weekly run from the SHAPE Intelligence Division with the Summaries, Joint

Intelligence papers, Iron Curtain Order of Battle all the top gen. One

shot in the back. Took his

dispatch-case and his wallet and watch."

Bond said: "That's bad. No chance that it was an ordinary hold-up? Or do they think the wallet

and watch were cover?"

"SHAPE Security can't make up their minds. On the whole they guess it was cover. Seven

o'clock in the morning's a rum time for a hold-up. But you can argue it out with them when you get

down there. M's sending you as his personal representative. He's worried as hell. Apart from the loss of

the Intelligence dope, their I. people have never liked having one of our Stations outside the

Reservation so to speak. For years they've been trying to get the St Germain unit incorporated in the

SHAPE Intelligence set-up. But you know what M is, independent old devil. He's never been happy

about NATO Security. Why, right in the SHAPE Intelligence Division there are not only a couple of

Frenchmen and an Italian, but the head of their Counter Intelligence and Security section is a German!"

Bond whistled.

"The trouble is that this damnable business is all SHAPE needs to bring M to heel. Anyway, he

says you're to get down there right away. I've fixed up clearance for you. Got the passes. You're to

report to Colonel Schreiber, Headquarters Command Security Branch. American. Efficient chap. He's

been handling the thing from the beginning. As far as I can gather, he's already done just about all there

was to be done."

"What's he done? What actually happened?"

Head of F picked up a map from his desk and walked over with it. It was the big-scale Michelin

Environs de Paris. He pointed with a pencil. "Here's Versailles, and here, just north of the park, is the

big junction of the Paris-Mantes and the Versailles autoroutes. A couple of hundred yards north of that,

on N184, is SHAPE. Every Wednesday, at seven in the morning, a Special Services dispatch-rider

leaves SHAPE with the weekly Intelligence stuff I told you about. He has to get to this little village

called Fourqueux, just outside St Germain, deliver his stuff to the duty officer at our HQ, and report

back to SHAPE by seven-thirty. Rather than go through all this built-up area, for security reasons his

orders are to take this N307 to St Nom, turn right-handed on to D98 and go under the autoroute and

through the forest of St Germain. The distance is about twelve kilometres, and taking it easy he'll do

the trip in under a quarter of an hour. Well, yesterday it was a corporal from the Corps of Signals, good

solid man called Bates, and when he hadn't reported back to SHAPE by seven-forty-five they sent

another rider to look for him. Not a trace, and he hadn't reported at our HQ. By eight-fifteen the

Security Branch was on the job, and by nine the roadblocks were up. The police and the Deuxième

were told and search parties got under way. The dogs found him, but not till the evening around six,

and by that time if there had been any clues on the road they'd have

been wiped out by the traffic."

Head of F handed the map to Bond and walked back to his desk. "And that's about the lot, except that

all the usual steps have been taken frontiers, ports, aerodromes and so forth. But that sort of thing

won't help. If it was a professional job, whoever did it could have had the stuff out of the country by

midday or into an embassy in Paris inside an hour."

Bond said impatiently: "Exactly! And so what the hell does M expect me to do? Tell SHAPE

Security to do it all over again, but better? This sort of thing isn't my line at all. Bloody waste of time."

Head of F smiled sympathetically. "Matter of fact I put much the same point of view to M over

the scrambler. Tactfully. The old man was quite reasonable. Said he wanted to show SHAPE he was

taking the business just as seriously as they were. You happened to be available and more or less on the

spot, and he said you had the sort of mind that might pick up the invisible factor. I asked him what he

meant, and he said that at all closely guarded headquarters there's bound to be an invisible man a

man everyone takes so much for granted that he just isn't noticed gardener, window cleaner,

postman. I said that SHAPE had thought of that, and that all those sort of jobs were done by enlisted

men. M told me not to be so literal-minded and hung up."

Bond laughed. He could see M's frown and hear the crusty voice. He said: "All right, then. I'll

see what I can do. Who do I report back to?"

"Here. M doesn't want the St Germain unit to get involved. Anything you have to say I'll put

straight on the printer to London. But I may not be available when you call up. I'll make someone your

duty officer and you'll be able to get them any time in the twenty-four hours. Russell can do it. She

picked you up. She might as well carry you. Suit you?"

"Yes," said Bond. "That'll be all right."

The battered Peugeot, commandeered by Rattray, smelled of her. There were bits of her in the

glove compartment half a packet of Suchard milk chocolate, a twist of paper containing bobby pins,

a paperback John O'Hara, a single black suede glove. Bond thought about her as far as the Etoile and

then closed his mind to her and pushed the car along fast through the Bois. Rattray had said it would

take about fifteen minutes at fifty. Bond said to halve the speed and double the time and to tell Colonel

Schreiber that he would be with him by nine-thirty. After the Porte de St Cloud there was little traffic,

and Bond held seventy on the autoroute until the second exit road came up on his right and there was

the red arrow for SHAPE. Bond turned up the slope and on to N184. Two hundred yards farther, in the

centre of the road, was the traffic policeman Bond had been told to look out for. The policeman waved

him in through the big gates on the left and he pulled up at the first checkpoint. A grey-uniformed

American policeman hung out of his cabin and glanced at his pass. He was told to pull inside and hold

it. Now a French policeman took his pass, noted the details on a

printed form clipped to a board, gave

him a large plastic windscreen number and waved him on. As Bond pulled in to the car park, with

theatrical suddenness a hundred arc-lights blazed and lit up the acre of low-lying hutments in front of

him as if it was day. Feeling naked, Bond walked across the open gravel beneath the flags of the NATO

countries and ran up the four shallow steps to the wide glass doors that gave entrance to the Supreme

Headquarters Allied Forces Europe. Now there was the main Security desk. American and French

military police checked his pass and noted the details. He was handed over to a red-capped British MP

and led off down the main corridor past endless office doors. They bore no names but the usual

alphabetical abracadabra of all headquarters. One said COMSTRIKFLTANT AND SACLANT LIAISON TO

SACEUR. Bond asked what it meant. The military policeman, either ignorant or, more probably,

security-minded, said stolidly: "Couldn't rightly say, sir."

Behind a door that said Colonel G. A. Schreiber, Chief of Security, Headquarters Command,

was a ramrod-straight, middle-aged American with greying hair and the politely negative manner of a

bank manager. There were several family photographs in silver frames on his desk and a vase

containing one white rose. There was no smell of tobacco smoke in the room. After cautiously amiable

preliminaries, Bond congratulated the Colonel on his security. He said: "All these checks and double

checks don't make it easy for the opposition. Have you ever lost

anything before, or have you ever

found signs of a serious attempt at a coup?"

"No to both questions, Commander. I'm quite satisfied about Headquarters. It's only the outlying

units that worry me. Apart from this section of your Secret Service, we have various detached signal

units. Then, of course, there are the Home Ministries of fourteen different nations. I can't answer for

what may leak from those quarters."

"It can't be an easy job," agreed Bond. "Now, about this mess. Has anything else come up since

Wing Commander Rattray spoke to you last?"

"Got the bullet. Luger. Severed the spinal cord. Probably fired at around thirty yards, give or

take ten yards. Assuming our man was riding a straight course, the bullet must have been fired from

dead astern on a level trajectory. Since it can't have been a man standing in the road, the killer must

have been moving in or on some vehicle."

"So your man would have seen him in the driving-mirror?"

"Probably."

"If your riders find themselves being followed, do they have any instructions about taking

evasive action?"

The Colonel smiled slightly. "Sure. They're told to go like hell."

"And at what speed did your man crash?"

"Not fast, they think. Between twenty and forty. What are you getting at, Commander?"

"I was wondering if you'd decided whether it was a pro or an amateur job. If your man wasn't

trying to get away, and assuming he saw the killer in his mirror, which I agree is only a probability, that

suggests that he accepted the man on his tail as friend rather than foe. That could mean some sort of

disguise that would fit in with the set-up here something your man would accept even at that hour of

the morning."

A small frown had been gathering across Colonel Schreiber's smooth forehead. "Commander,"

there was an edge of tension in the voice, "we have, of course, been considering every angle of this

case, including the one you mention. At midday yesterday the Commanding General declared

emergency in this matter, standing security and security ops committees were set up, and from that

moment on every angle, every hint of a clue, has been systematically run to earth. And I can tell you,

Commander," the Colonel raised one well-manicured hand and let it descend in soft emphasis on his

blotting-pad, "any man who can come up with an even remotely original idea on this case will have to

be closely related to Einstein. There is nothing, repeat nothing, to go on in this case whatsoever."

Bond smiled sympathetically. He got to his feet. "In that case, Colonel, I won't waste any more

of your time this evening. If I could just have the minutes of the various meetings to bring myself up to

date, and if one of your men could show me the way to the canteen and my quarters . . ."

"Sure, sure." The Colonel pressed a bell. A young crew-cut aide came in. "Proctor, show the

Commander to his room in the VIP wing, would you, and then take him along to the bar and the

canteen." He turned to Bond. "I'll have those papers ready for you after you've had a meal and a drink.

They'll be in my office. They can't be taken out, of course, but you'll find everything to hand next door,

and Proctor will be able to fill you in on anything that's missing." He held out his hand. "Okay? Then

we'll meet again in the morning."

Bond said goodnight and followed the aide out. As he walked along the neutral-painted, neutral-

smelling corridors, he reflected that this was probably the most hopeless assignment he had ever been

on. If the top security brains of fourteen countries were stumped, what hope had he got? By the time he

was in bed that night, in the Spartan luxury of the visitors' overnight quarters, Bond had decided he

would give it a couple more days largely for the sake of keeping in touch with Mary Ann Russell for

as long as possible and then chuck it. On this decision he fell immediately into a deep and

untroubled sleep.

Not two, but four days later, as the dawn came up over the Forest of St Germain, James Bond

was lying along the thick branch of an oak tree keeping watch over a small empty glade that lay deep

among the trees bordering D98, the road of the murder.

He was dressed from head to foot in parachutists' camouflage green, brown and black. Even

his hands were covered with the stuff, and there was a hood over his head with slits cut for the eyes and

mouth. It was good camouflage which would be still better when the sun was higher and the shadows

black, and from anywhere on the ground, even directly below the high branch, he could not be seen.

It had come about like this. The first two days at SHAPE had been the expected waste of time.

Bond had achieved nothing except to make himself mildly unpopular with the persistence of his

double-checking questions. On the morning of the third day he was about to go and say his goodbyes

when he had a telephone call from the Colonel. "Oh, Commander, thought I'd let you know that the last

team of police dogs got in late last night your idea that it might be worth while covering the whole

forest. Sorry" the voice sounded un-sorry "but negative, absolutely negative."

"Oh. My fault for the wasted time." As much to annoy the Colonel as anything, Bond said:

"Mind if I have a talk with the handler?"

"Sure, sure. Anything you want. By the way, Commander, how long are you planning to be

around? Glad to have you with us for as long as you like. But it's a question of your room. Seems

there's a big party coming in from Holland in a few days' time. Top level staff course or something of

the kind, and Admin says they're a bit pushed for space."

Bond had not expected to get on well with Colonel Schreiber and he had not done so. He said

amiably: "I'll see what my Chief has to say and call you back, Colonel."

"Do that, would you." The Colonel's voice was equally polite, but the manners of

both men were running out and the two receivers broke the line simultaneously.

The chief handler was a Frenchman from the Landes. He had the quick sly eyes of a poacher.

Bond met him at the kennels, but the handler's proximity was too much for the Alsatians and, to get

away from the noise, he took Bond into the duty-room, a tiny office with binoculars hanging from

pegs, and waterproofs, gumboots, dog-harness and other gear stacked round the walls. There were a

couple of deal chairs and a table covered with a large-scale map of the Forest of St Germain. This had

been marked off into pencilled squares. The handler made a gesture over the map. "Our dogs covered it

all, Monsieur. There is nothing there."

"Do you mean to say they didn't check once?"

The handler scratched his head. "We had trouble with a bit of game, Monsieur. There was a hare

or two. A couple of foxes' earths. We had quite a time getting them away from a clearing near the

Carrefour Royal. They probably still smelled the gipsies."

"Oh." Bond was only mildly interested. "Show me. Who were these gipsies?"

The handler pointed daintily with a grimy little finger. "These are the names from the old days.

Here is the Etoile Parfaite, and here, where the killing took place, is the Carrefour des Curieux. And

here, forming the bottom of the triangle, is the Carrefour Royal. It makes," he added dramatically, "a

cross with the road of death." He took a pencil out of his pocket and made a dot just off the crossroads.

"And this is the clearing, Monsieur. There was a gipsy caravan there for most of the winter. They left

last month. Cleaned the place up all right, but, for the dogs, their scent will hang about there for

months."

Bond thanked him, and after inspecting and admiring the dogs and making some small talk

about the handler's profession, he got into the Peugeot and went off to the gendarmerie in St Germain.

"Yes, certainly they had known the gipsies. Real Romany-looking fellows. Hardly spoke a word of

French, but they had behaved themselves. There had been no complaints. Six men and two women. No.

No one had seen them go. One morning they just weren't there any more. Might have been gone a week

for all one knew. They had chosen an isolated spot."

Bond took the D98 through the forest. When the great autoroute bridge showed up a quarter of a

mile ahead over the road, Bond accelerated and then switched off the engine and coasted silently until

he came to the Carrefour Royal. He stopped and got out of the car without a sound, and, feeling rather

foolish, softly entered the forest and walked with great circumspection towards where the clearing

would be. Twenty yards inside the trees he came to it. He stood in the fringe of bushes and trees and

examined it carefully. Then he walked in and went over it from end to end.

The clearing was about as big as two tennis courts and floored in thick

grass and moss. There

was one large patch of lilies of the valley and, under the bordering trees, a scattering of bluebells. To

one side there was a low mound, perhaps a tumulus, completely surrounded and covered with brambles

and brier roses now thickly in bloom. Bond walked round this and gazed in among the roots, but there

was nothing to see except the earthy shape of the mound.

Bond took one last look round and then went to the corner of the clearing that would be nearest

to the road. Here there was easy access through the trees. Were there traces of a path, a slight flattening

of the leaves? Not more than would have been left by the gipsies or last year's picnickers. On the edge

of the road there was a narrow passage between two trees. Casually Bond bent to examine the trunks.

He stiffened and dropped to a crouch. With a fingernail, he delicately scraped away a narrow sliver of

caked mud. It hid a deep scratch in the tree-trunk. He caught the scraps of mud in his free hand. He

now spat and moistened the mud and carefully filled up the scratch again. There were three

camouflaged scratches on one tree and four on the other. Bond walked quickly out of the trees on to the

road. His car had stopped on a slight slope leading down under the autoroute bridge. Although there

was some protection from the boom of the traffic on the autoroute, Bond pushed the car, jumped in and

only engaged the gears when he was well under the bridge.

And now Bond was back in the clearing, above it, and he still did not know if his hunch had

been right. It had been M's dictum that had put him on the scent if it was a scent and the mention

of the gipsies. "It was the gipsies the dogs smelled . . . Most of the winter . . . they went last month. No

complaints . . . One morning they just weren't there any more." The invisible factor. The invisible man.

The people who are so much part of the background that you don't know if they're there or not. Six men

and two girls and they hardly spoke a word of French. Good cover, gipsies. You could be a foreigner

and yet not a foreigner, because you were only a gipsy. Some of them had gone off in the caravan. Had

some of them stayed, built themselves a hide-out during the winter, a secret place from which the

hijacking of the top secret dispatches had been the first sortie? Bond had thought he was building

fantasies until he found the scratches, the carefully camouflaged scratches, on the two trees. They were

just at the height where, if one was carrying any kind of a cycle, the pedals might catch against the

bark. It could all be a pipedream, but it was good enough for Bond. The only question in his mind was

whether these people had made a one-time-only coup or whether they were so confident of their

security that they would try again. He confided only in Station F. Mary Ann Russell told him to be

careful. Head of F, more constructively, ordered his unit at St Germain to co-operate. Bond said

goodbye to Colonel Schreiber and moved to a camp bed in the unit's HQ an anonymous house in an

anonymous village back street. The unit had provided the camouflage outfit and the four Secret Service

men who ran the unit had happily put themselves under Bond's orders. They realised as well as Bond

did that if Bond managed to wipe the eye of the whole security machine of SHAPE, the Secret Service

would have won a priceless feather in its cap vis-à-vis the SHAPE High Command, and M's worries

over the independence of his unit would be gone for ever.

Bond, lying along the oak branch, smiled to himself. Private armies, private wars. How much

energy they siphoned off from the common cause, how much fire they directed away from the common

enemy!

Six-thirty. Time for breakfast. Cautiously Bond's right hand fumbled in his clothing and came

up to the slit of his mouth. Bond made the glucose tablet last as long as possible and then sucked

another. His eyes never left the glade. The red squirrel that had appeared at first light and had been

steadily eating away at young beech shoots ever since, ran a few feet nearer to the rose-bushes on the

mound, picked up something and began turning it in his paws and nibbling at it. Two wood pigeons

that had been noisily courting among the thick grass started to make clumsy, fluttering love. A pair of

hedge sparrows went busily on collecting bits and pieces for a nest they were tardily building in a

thorn-bush. The fat thrush finally located its worm and began pulling at it, its legs braced. Bees

clustered thick among the roses on the mound, and from where he was, perhaps twenty yards away

from and above the mound, Bond could just hear their summery

sound. It was a scene from a fairytale

the roses the lilies of the valley, the birds and the great shafts of sunlight lancing down through the

tall trees into the pool of glistening green. Bond had climbed to his hide-out at four in the morning and

he had never examined so closely or for so long the transition from night to a glorious day. He

suddenly felt rather foolish. Any moment now and some damned bird would come and sit on his head!

It was the pigeons that gave the first alarm. With a loud clatter they took off and dashed into the

trees. All the birds followed, and the squirrel. Now the glade was quiet except for the soft hum of the

bees. What had sounded the alarm? Bond's heart began to thump. His eyes hunted, quartering the glade

for a clue. Something was moving among the roses. It was a tiny movement, but an extraordinary one.

Slowly, inch by inch, a single thorny stem, an unnaturally straight and rather thick one, was rising

through the upper branches. It went on rising until it was a clear foot above the bush. Then it stopped.

There was a solitary pink rose at the tip of the stem. Separated from the bush, it looked unnatural, but

only if one happened to have watched the whole process. At a casual glance it was a stray stem and

nothing else. Now, silently, the petals of the rose seemed to swivel and expand, the yellow pistils drew

aside and sun glinted on a glass lens the size of a shilling. The lens seemed to be looking straight at

Bond, but then very, very slowly, the rose-eye began to turn on its stem and continued to turn until the

lens was again looking at Bond and the whole glade had been minutely surveyed. As if satisfied, the

petals softly swivelled to cover the eye and very slowly the single rose descended to join the others.

Bond's breath came out with a rush. He momentarily closed his eyes to rest them. Gipsies! If

that piece of machinery was any evidence, inside the mound, deep down in the earth, was certainly the

most professional left-behind spy unit that had ever been devised far more brilliant than anything

England had prepared to operate in the wake of a successful German invasion, far better than what the

Germans themselves had left behind in the Ardennes. A shiver of excitement and anticipation

almost of fear ran down Bond's spine. So he had been right! But what was to be the next act?

Now, from the direction of the mound, came a thin high-pitched whine the sound of an

electric motor at very high revs. The rose bush trembled slightly. The bees took off, hovered, and

settled again. Slowly, a jagged fissure formed down the centre of the big bush and smoothly widened.

Now the two halves of the bush were opening like double doors. The dark aperture broadened until

Bond could see the roots of the bush running into the earth on both sides of the opening doorway. The

whine of machinery was louder and there was a glint of metal from the edges of the curved doors. It

was like the opening of a hinged Easter egg. In a moment the two segments stood apart and the two

halves of the rose bush, still alive with bees, were splayed widely open. Now the inside of the metal

caisson that supported the earth and the roots of the bush were naked to the sun. There was a glint of

pale electric light from the dark aperture between the curved doors. The whine of the motor had

stopped. A head and shoulders appeared, and then the rest of the man. He climbed softly out and

crouched, looking sharply round the glade. There was a gun a Luger in his hand. Satisfied, he

turned and gestured into the shaft. The head and shoulders of a second man appeared. He handed up

three pairs of what looked like snowshoes and ducked out of sight. The first man selected a pair and

knelt and strapped them over his boots. Now he moved about more freely, leaving no footprints, for the

glass flattened only momentarily under the wide mesh and then rose slowly again. Bond smiled to

himself. Clever bastards!

The second man emerged. He was followed by a third. Between them they manhandled a motor-

cycle out of the shaft and stood holding it slung between them by harness webbing while the first man,

who was clearly the leader, knelt and strapped the snowshoes under their boots. Then, in single file,

they moved off through the trees towards the road. There was something extraordinarily sinister about

the way they softly high-stepped along through the shadows, lifting and carefully placing each big

webbed foot in turn.

Bond let out a long sigh of released tension and laid his head softly down on the branch to relax

the strain in his neck muscles. So that was the score! Even the last

small detail could now be added to

the file. While the two underlings were dressed in grey overalls, the leader was wearing the uniform of

the Royal Corps of Signals and his motor-cycle was an olive green BSA M20 with a British Army

registration number on its petrol tank. No wonder the SHAPE dispatch-rider had let him get within

range. And what did the unit do with its top secret booty? Probably radioed the cream of it out at night.

Instead of the periscope, a rose-stalk aerial would rise up from the bush, the pedal generator would get

going deep down under the earth and off would go the high-speed cipher groups. Ciphers? There would

be many good enemy secrets down that shaft if Bond could round up the unit when it was outside the

hide-out. And what a chance to feed back phoney intelligence to GRU, the Soviet Military Intelligence

Apparat which was presumably the control! Bond's thoughts raced.

The two underlings were coming back. They went into the shaft and the rose bush closed over it.

The leader with his machine would be among the bushes on the verge of the road. Bond glanced at his

watch. Six-fifty-five. Of course! He would be waiting to see if a dispatch-rider came along. Either he

did not know the man he had killed was doing a weekly run, which was unlikely, or he was assuming

that SHAPE would now change the routine for additional security. These were careful people. Probably

their orders were to clean up as much as possible before the summer came and there were too many

holidaymakers about in the forest. Then the unit might be pulled out

and put back again in the winter.

Who could say what the long-term plans were? Sufficient that the leader was preparing for another kill.

The minutes ticked by. At seven-ten the leader reappeared. He stood in the shadow of a big tree

at the edge of the clearing and whistled once on a brief, high, birdlike note. Immediately the rose bush

began to open and the two underlings came out and followed the leader back into the trees. In two

minutes they were back with the motor-cycle slung between them. The leader, after a careful look

round to see that they had left no traces, followed them down into the shaft and the two halves of the

rose bush closed swiftly behind him.

Half an hour later life had started up in the glade again. An hour later still, when the high sun

had darkened the shadows, James Bond silently edged backwards along his branch, dropped softly on

to a patch of moss behind some brambles and melted carefully back into the forest.

That evening Bond's routine call with Mary Ann Russell was a stormy one. She said: "You're

crazy. I'm not going to let you do it. I'm going to get Head of F to ring up Colonel Schreiber and tell

him the whole story. This is SHAPE's job. Not yours."

Bond said sharply: "You'll do nothing of the sort. Colonel Schreiber says he's perfectly happy to

let me make a dummy run tomorrow morning instead of the duty dispatch-rider. That's all he needs to

know at this stage. Reconstruction of the crime sort of thing. He couldn't care less. He's practically

closed the file on this business. Now, be a good girl and do as you're told. Just put my report on the

printer to M. He'll see the point of me cleaning this thing up. He won't object."

"Damn M! Damn you! Damn the whole silly Service!" There were angry tears in the voice.

"You're just a lot of children playing at Red Indians. Taking these people on by yourself! It's it's

showing off. That's all it is. Showing off."

Bond was beginning to get annoyed. He said: "That's enough, Mary Ann. Put that report on the

printer. I'm sorry, but it's an order."

There was resignation in the voice. "Oh, all right. You don't have to pull your rank on me. But

don't get hurt. At least you'll have the boys from the local Station to pick up the bits. Good luck."

"Thanks, Mary Ann. And will you have dinner with me tomorrow night? Some place like

Armenonville. Pink champagne and gipsy violins. Paris in the spring routine."

"Yes," she said seriously. "I'd like that. But then take care all the more, would you? Please?"

"Of course I will. Don't worry. Goodnight."

"Night."

Bond spent the rest of the evening putting a last high polish on his plans and giving a final

briefing to the four men from the Station.

It was another beautiful day; Bond, sitting comfortably astride the throbbing BSA waiting for

the off, could hardly believe in the ambush that would now be waiting

for him just beyond the

Carrefour Royal. The corporal from the Signal Corps who had handed him his empty dispatch-case and

was about to give him the signal to go said: "You look as if you'd been in the Royal Corps all your life,

sir. Time for a haircut soon, I'd say, but the uniform's bang on. How d'you like the bike, sir?"

"Goes like a dream. I'd forgotten what fun these damned things are."

"Give me a nice little Austin A40 any day, sir." The corporal looked at his watch. "Seven

o'clock just coming up." He held up his thumb. "Okay."

Bond pulled the goggles down over his eyes, lifted a hand to the corporal, kicked the machine

into gear and wheeled off across the gravel and through the main gates.

Off 184 and on to 307, through Bailly and Noisy-le-Roi and there was the straggle of St Nom.

Here he would be turning sharp right on to D98 the 'route de la mort', as the handler had called it.

Bond pulled into the grass verge and once more looked to the long-barrel .45 Colt. He put the warm

gun back against his stomach and left the jacket button undone. On your marks! Get set . . . !

Bond took the sharp corner and accelerated up to fifty. The viaduct carrying the Paris autoroute

loomed up ahead. The dark mouth of the tunnel beneath it opened and swallowed him. The noise of his

exhaust was gigantic, and for an instant there was a tunnel smell of cold and damp. Then he was out in

the sunshine again and immediately across the Carrefour Royal. Ahead the oily tarmac glittered dead

straight for two miles through the enchanted forest and there was a sweet smell of leaves and dew.

Bond cut his speed to forty. The driving-mirror by his left hand shivered slightly with his speed. It

showed nothing but an empty unfurling vista of road between lines of trees that curled away behind

him like a green wake. No sign of the killer. Had he taken fright? Had there been some hitch? But then

there was a tiny black speck in the centre of the convex glass a midge that became a fly and then a

bee and then a beetle. Now it was a crash helmet bent low over handlebars between two big black

paws. God, he was coming fast! Bond's eyes flickered from the mirror to the road ahead and back to the

mirror. When the killer's right hand went for his gun . . . !

Bond slowed thirty-five, thirty, twenty. Ahead the tarmac was smooth as metal. A last quick

look in the mirror. The right hand had left the handlebars. The sun on the man's goggles made huge

fiery eyes below the rim of the crash helmet. Now! Bond braked fiercely and skidded the BSA through

forty-five degrees, killing the engine. He was not quite quick enough on the draw. The killer's gun

flared twice and a bullet tore into the saddle-springs beside Bond's thigh. But then the Colt spoke its

single word, and the killer and his BSA, as if lassoed from within the forest, veered crazily off the road,

leapt the ditch and crashed head-on into the trunk of a beech. For a moment the tangle of man and

machinery clung to the broad trunk and then, with a metallic death-rattle, toppled backwards into the

grass.

Bond got off his machine and walked over to the ugly twist of khaki and smoking steel. There

was no need to feel for a pulse. Wherever the bullet had struck, the crash helmet had smashed like an

eggshell. Bond turned away and thrust his gun back into the front of his tunic. He had been lucky. It

would not do to press his luck. He got on the BSA and accelerated back down the road.

He leant the BSA up against one of the scarred trees just inside the forest and walked softly

through to the edge of the clearing. He took up his stand in the shadow of the big beech. He moistened

his lips and gave, as near as he could, the killer's bird-whistle. He waited. Had he got the whistle

wrong? But then the bush trembled and the high thin whine began. Bond hooked his right thumb

through his belt within inches of his gun-butt. He hoped he would not have to do any more killing. The

two underlings had not seemed to be armed. With any luck they would come quietly.

Now the curved doors were open. From where he was, Bond could not see down the shaft, but

within seconds the first man was out and putting on his snowshoes and the second followed.

Snowshoes! Bond's heart missed a beat. He had forgotten them! They must be hidden back there in the

bushes. Blasted fool! Would they notice?

The two men came slowly towards him, delicately placing their feet. When he was about twenty

feet away, the leading man said something softly in what sounded like

Russian. When Bond did not

reply, the two men stopped in their tracks. They stared at him in astonishment, waiting perhaps for the

answer to a password. Bond sensed trouble. He whipped out his gun and moved towards them,

crouching. "Hands up." He gestured with the muzzle of the Colt. The leading man shouted an order and

threw himself forward. At the same time the second man made a dash back towards the hideout. A rifle

boomed from among the trees and the man's right leg buckled under him. The men from the Station

broke cover and came running. Bond fell to one knee and clubbed upwards with his gun-barrel at the

hurtling body. It made contact, but then the man was on him. Bond saw fingernails flashing towards his

eyes, ducked and ran into an upper-cut. Now a hand was at his right wrist and his gun was being slowly

turned on him. Not wanting to kill, he had kept the safety catch up. He tried to get his thumb to it. A

boot hit him in the side of the head and he let the gun go and fell back. Through a red mist he saw the

muzzle of the gun pointing at his face. The thought flashed through his mind that he was going to die

die for showing mercy . . . !

Suddenly the gun muzzle had gone and the weight of the man was off him. Bond got to his

knees and then to his feet. The body, spreadeagled in the grass beside him, gave a last kick. There were

bloody rents in the back of the dungarees. Bond looked round. The four men from the Station were in a

group. Bond undid the strap of his crash helmet and rubbed the side of

his head. He said: "Well, thanks.

Who did it?"

Nobody answered. The men looked embarrassed.

Bond walked towards them, puzzled. "What's up?"

Suddenly Bond caught a trace of movement behind the men. An extra leg showed a woman's

leg. Bond laughed out loud. The men grinned sheepishly and looked behind them. Mary Ann Russell,

in a brown shirt and black jeans, came out from behind them with her hands up. One of the hands held

what looked like a .22 target pistol. She brought her hands down and tucked the pistol into the top of

her jeans. She came up to Bond. She said anxiously: "You won't blame anybody, will you? I just

wouldn't let them leave this morning without me." Her eyes pleaded. "Rather lucky I did come, really. I

mean, I just happened to get to you first. No one wanted to shoot for fear of hitting you."

Bond smiled into her eyes. He said: "If you hadn't come, I'd have had to break that dinner date."

He turned back to the men, his voice businesslike. "All right. One of you take the motor-bike and report

the gist of this to Colonel Schreiber. Say we're waiting for his team before we take a look at the hide-

out. And would he include a couple of anti-sabotage men. That shaft may be booby-trapped. All right?"

Bond took the girl by the arm. He said: "Come over here. I want to show you a bird's nest."

"Is that an order?"

"Yes."

